

CHAPBOOK REVIEW:

A COMPLICATED READING OF AN EASY READ:

ON EUGENIA ZUROSKI'S HOVERING, SEEN

Reviewed by Terry Trowbridge

Hovering, Seen by Eugenia Zuroski (2019), is a collection of nine short poems about memory, and among the latest chapbooks from Anstruther Press. It is pithy, light verse. In the right tone of voice, on the right evening of live poetry, any of these poems could be an icebreaker, a quick joke, a denouement after more serious notes. Maybe treating *Hovering* as a serious book that deserves a deep reading is a stretch. Maybe there is not enough serious attention given to light verse, so it is time to do some yoga.

These nine poems are sufficient examples of how nonexperts in Canadian society work with memory, without a formal theory of memory to inform them. There is no twenty-first century psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic theory of memory or recalling events. Instead, our century reuses the psychoanalytic theories of the twentieth century. If we want to know what the latest psychological theories of memory entail, we must develop our expert vocabularies in neuroanatomical, psychopharmacology, and clinical studies. We lack everyday language for our everyday activity of remembering. There is no twenty-first century pedestrian language to describe how we remember holiday traditions as we practice them, like in Zuroski's "Easter Poem" (13). There is little said by experts about writing a love poem in order to remember an ex-lover, like in Zuroski's "Love Poem" (6). Zuroski is the nonexpert filling the descriptive void left by our experts.

Zuroski's poems can (somewhat) illustrate the theories of the philosopher Daniel Dennett. Simply put, Dennett's theory is that memories lack detail. Detail is really storytelling we invent to convince ourselves that we have memories and personal histories of the sort we consider convincing and reassuring of our reality.

Zuroski offers examples of the mundane moments that make possible the storytelling that Dennett focuses on. What offers *Hovering* a potential philosophical breadth, is that because the twenty first century lacks for its own popular culture theory of what memory is, we tend to only reflect on memory itself by talking about incomplete narratives. Zuroski's poem "Where I Was" shows how the barest of details "in line/laid out/against a screen" or the suggestion of details, "and the only sign/of life" can be enough for readers to create a narrative. Her poem "The Poem I Wrote in My Head While Watching Dovzhenko's 'Earth' and Can't Remember" demonstrates how even the act of forgetting is turned into a memory. The absence of the absent lines is what reassures us that someone is conscious.

"Inventory" (5), is a surreal inventory of the objects in a room. Or, maybe, it is not surreal, but just a list of objects in a museum. It is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's discussion of classifications and systems of knowledge in his book *The Order of Things*. Zuroski lists objects based on the actions necessary to activate them. "in this room there are five kinds of bone...there are three holes/for fingers, not counting/the sockets of the skull" tells us nothing about what the bones are for, but presumably how they could be used. Likewise, "this one is a knife/pointed north" infers an intention behind how the knife is set, but no explanation for its purpose.

The final object in the inventory is not actually in the room, but an analogy of what is "sacred and strange...debris." the final object is "salt in a jar/held in reserve/for no purpose, for/unseeded weather" which is as good an analogy for memories as any other description. Memories are the products of inventories, and often, when we say what an object *is*, we are still describing form over function. We call an object a knife, a jar, a bowling ball, because we know what it does. We can point it north, we can fill it with salt, we can put our fingers in the three holes and roll it down an alley. Inventories are different memories than our personal memory of the knife we used as a compass, the jar we filled with salt while we were thinking up analogies, or the skull we carried home.

Do not let any of this serious reflection deter you from sharing *Hovering, Seen* with non-academic friends and family. It is a good gift for someone who likes to watch owl videos on YouTube and go to zine fairs. There might be solace in it for a victim of a bad breakup, or some other gentle bruise. *Hovering, Seen* is a chapbook that is meant to be performed at literary readings. Audiences will gladly appreciate Zuroski's simplicity alongside more demanding, cerebral, or emotionally heavy poets.

Bio

Terry Trowbridge is a PhD student in Socio-Legal Studies at York University, Toronto. His poems have appeared in journals in England, the USA, and Canada, including *The Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, *The Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, *The Mathematical Intelligencer*, *Carousel*, *subTerrain*, *paperplates*, *Untethered*, *American Mathematical Monthly*, *The Great Lakes Review*, *Studies in Social Justice*, *Studies in Arts and Humanities*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *The New Quarterly*, *CV2*, and many others. He is one of the current organizers of the Art Bar Poetry Series.